

CLAIM AMENDMENTS

1 1. (currently amended) A molding method comprising the
2 steps of:
3 drawing a plastic hollow preform through a mold passage
4 formed in a closed mold by applying a generally constant suction to
5 a downstream end of a conduit having an upstream end connected to
6 an output end of the mold passage; and
7 varying a flow cross section of the conduit between its
8 upstream and downstream ends ~~so as to vary~~ and thereby varying a
9 rate at which the preform is drawn through the passage by the
10 suction.

1 2. (original) The molding method defined in claim 1
2 wherein the flow cross section is varied by displacing a valve
3 element in the conduit between positions in which it differently
4 blocks flow through the conduit.

1 3. (original) The molding method defined in claim 2,
2 further comprising the step of
3 admitting outside air to the conduit downstream of the
4 valve element when pressure in the conduit downstream of the
5 element drops below a predetermined level.

1 4. (original) The molding method defined in claim 1,
2 further comprising the steps of:

3 displacing the hollow preform toward the mold and into
4 the passage at a predetermined rate;

5 pinching off trailing and leading ends of the preform
6 when same are respectively at the output end and an intake end of
7 the passage;

8 inflating the preform after pinching-off its ends and
9 curing the preform.

1 5. (original) The molding method defined in claim 4,
2 further comprising the steps of:

3 opening the mold after curing the preform;

4 removing the cured preform from the open mold; and

5 reclosing the mold.

1 6. (currently amended) A molding apparatus comprising:
2 a closable mold forming when closed a nonstraight passage
3 having an intake end and an output end;
4 extruder means for forming a hollow plastic preform and
5 feeding it to the intake end of the passage;
6 a suction conduit having an upstream end connected to the
7 output end of the passage and a downstream end;
8 pump means connected to the downstream end of the conduit
9 for applying a generally constant suction thereto;
10 a valve element in the conduit intermediate its ends
11 movable for varying a flow cross section of the conduit; and
12 control means connected to the conduit and to the extruder
13 means for moving the valve element, [[and]] varying suction
14 applied through the conduit to the passage in accordance with a
15 position of the preform relative to the mold, and thereby varying a
16 rate at which the preform is drawn through the passage by the
17 suction.

1 7. (original) The molding apparatus defined in claim 6
2 wherein the valve element is pivotal in the conduit.

1 8. (original) The molding apparatus defined in claim 5,
2 further comprising
3 bypass means for introducing air into the conduit down-
4 stream of the element when pressure downstream of the element drops
5 below a predetermined level.

1 9. (original) The molding apparatus defined in claim 5
2 wherein the pump means has an output provided with a sound muffler.